

CHAPTER V: DOWNTOWN

The City began in the area we now know as the "downtown area" or the "central business district". Boundaries for downtown vary considerably and range from those defining the primary and secondary special tax districts on and immediately around the Loudoun Street Mall, to those encompassing all of the rigid grid streets extending north-south from Peyton Street to James Street and east-west from East Lane to where Amherst and Boscawen Streets intersect. In over 200 years many buildings have been constructed to meet the varied needs of residence, business and industry in this growing community. Some of the earliest houses were replaced or converted to business and industrial use as the city grew as a center for commerce and government. Happily though, many early buildings remain and a unique central city environment exists.

For a time it appeared that the typical central city problems of congestion and decay would leave little of merit in Winchester's downtown. However, for the last 20 to 25 years the City has taken the initiative to improve the downtown area and heighten its vitality. First, alternate routes for through traffic were improved. The congestion of the old days of Route 11 is no more. The central shopping street was converted into an attractive pedestrian shopping mall, the first in Virginia. Much needed parking facilities have been built and the means found to finance them, and zoning regulations have been adapted to the special needs of the area. While the character and function of Winchester's downtown area has changed, and will change again with the years, the downtown area will always be a vital part of the city's life.

PAST PLANNING STUDIES

One of the first studies that recognized the special problems of downtown was the 1958 Master Plan. This Plan: 1. recognized the need to remove the traffic "bottleneck" in the central business district with an Interstate bypass; 2. suggested a pedestrian mall on Loudoun Street; and, 3. proposed a plan for traffic and parking. The Interstate bypass became reality with the opening of Route 37 around the west side of the City as shown on the transportation plan. The other two elements are addressed later in this chapter.

The 1974 Comprehensive Plan addressed the downtown area as part of the discussion on commercial land utilization. The plan noted the improving supply of parking (as compared with that available in 1966), and described the pedestrian mall under construction at that time. Goals for the downtown emphasized the need for accessibility for automobiles, multi-level parking, major retail expansion, height limits, and transit operation.

The 1982 Comprehensive Plan Update did not present any major changes to the downtown commercial center. The major recommendation espoused in the 1982 Plan was the creation of the Residential-Business District which was implemented in 1990. Other recommendations in the Plan echoed a 1978 study (referenced later in this chapter) calling for the development of the

Joint Judicial Center and Court Square AutoPark. Impacts caused by the relocation of the three major retail stores from the downtown to the Apple Blossom Mall were discussed also.

In 1983, a design implementation plan entitled Streetscape Design for Old Town Winchester was prepared for the Downtown Development Board. The goals of the design program were:

1. *Creation of a sense of place through visual identity that attracts people to Old Town,*
2. *Creation of a unified Old Town District which minimizes the distinction between the Loudoun Mall and the rest of the District, and*
3. *Provision of a commercial-governmental center that will maintain vitality and contribute to the well-being of the City of Winchester.*

The 1983 report provided detailed, site-specific recommendations for many areas of downtown including the areas in front of the old courthouse and the judicial center. Extensive use of graphics throughout the report helped to convey the image of Old Town envisioned by the Board and its consultant.

THE PEDESTRIAN MALL

The mall concept was investigated seriously in 1964 when the Winchester Evening Star and the Northern Virginia Power Company initiated, financed, and published a professional study of downtown Winchester. Also in 1964, City Council created the Downtown Development Board. The Downtown Development Board obtained the necessary state legislation in 1972 to allow the City to tax abutting property owners around the mall site. Construction of the pedestrian mall, extending approximately one-third of a mile from Cork Street to Piccadilly Street, occurred in 1974. A major resurfacing project for the mall is included in the City's 1991 Capital Improvement Program

TRAFFIC AND PARKING

The Winchester Parking Authority was created by City Council in 1964. A detailed parking study for the downtown was performed by Wilbur Smith and Associates in 1966. As a part of the City's commitment to downtown improvements, the Winchester Parking Authority has virtually ringed the central business area with attractive parking lots. The Braddock Street AutoPark, a 300-space parking garage, was the first such facility completed in 1972. The Court Square AutoPark, was called for in the Feasibility Study for Court and Office facilities prepared for Frederick County and the City by the VVCR Partnership in 1978. The need for this structure was corroborated by another study by Wilbur Smith and Associates in September 1980. The Court Square garage added 445 spaces upon completion in 1982. A third parking garage is nearing completion at the corner of East Fairfax Lane and North Loudoun Street and will provide 481 spaces to serve the parking needs at the north end of the downtown.

The traffic system in downtown Winchester reflects a complex network of streets. While there is always room for traffic engineering improvements,

more efficient signal systems and the like, no major re-routing of traffic is proposed. When completed, Jubal Early Drive will take some through traffic out of downtown. Some additional traffic relief may be expected upon completion of new streets around the north end of the City from Route 7. Synchronized signalization has improved traffic flow and further study of on-street parking and loading practices may suggest changes to the current policies. The opening of the new parking garage may provide a good opportunity to investigate the parking situation particularly along Piccadilly Street and Fairfax Lane.

Ongoing evaluation of the directional characteristics of the downtown street network should continue. Because many of the properties fronting along Piccadilly Street have no rear access for deliveries, the removal of parking and loading may be difficult. The ability to provide two-way traffic movement on this street is severely restricted with the continuation of some or all parking. While two-way traffic offers some apparent conveniences, particularly during the off-peak hours, it dramatically multiplies the time delays needed to accommodate left-turning movements during times of heavy traffic. Two-way traffic also compounds the hazards to pedestrians, especially those accustomed to looking for vehicles in only one direction.

From time to time, consideration has been given to elimination of traffic from Boscawen Street since it cuts across the mall. For the time being, however, the traffic convenience of the street appears to outweigh the largely aesthetic effect of removal of traffic and conversion of Boscawen Street to an east-west extension of the mall. While it may be advantageous to improve the appearance of the street and its usefulness as a pedestrian way, no convenient alternative exists for vehicle access to the new judicial center and parking garage located along Boscawen Street between Cameron and Kent Streets.

The City has assumed the major share of responsibility for providing off-street parking space in the downtown area. As shown in Table V-A, the numbers of parking spaces has increased substantially since 1973 with construction of new garages. Curb spaces have remained about the same since 1973, although there has been considerable change to the designation of these spaces. For example, the number of free-of-charge curb spaces has increased while the number of reserved curb spaces has declined. Off-street spaces, both public and private fluctuate considerably over time. Public lot spaces are affected negatively by conversion of surface lots to structured (garage) spaces or buildings and positively by purchase or lease of private parking areas. Private lot spaces are affected positively by demolitions and negatively by building expansions. Municipal parking facilities are located to serve all sections of the central retail and services core. Completion of the new structure on the north end should meet anticipated space needs for the immediate future. The public lots near the east end of Wolfe Street and the lot on the corner of Cork Street and Loudoun Street are among the most heavily utilized. Consideration should be given to providing additional parking capacity serving the south end of the mall particularly since one of the lots is on a lease basis only.

From the standpoint of public transportation, the new bus routes should continue to be of benefit to the downtown area. The central bus transfer point is located opposite the City Hall. Currently, there are only two bus

Table V-A

NUMBER OF PARKING FACILITIES, BY TYPE OF FACILITY
Winchester Central Business Area 1973, 1981 and 1990

TYPE OF SPACES		1973 Spaces ^{a/}		1981 Spaces ^{b/}		1990 Spaces ^{c/}	
		Number	Percent of Total	Number	Percent of Total	Number	Percent of Total
CURB	CURB SPACES						
	Hourly	312	72.06%	302	72.42%	305	70.11%
	Free Space	89	20.55%	93	22.30%	123	28.28%
	Reserved ^{d/}	32	7.39%	22	5.28%	7	1.61%
	TOTAL CURB % of ALL SPACES	433	15.65%	417	13.79%	435	12.07%
LOT	LOT SPACES						
	Public						
	Hourly	357	17.56%	427	22.93%	220	11.33%
	Rented ^{d/}	132	6.49%	84	4.51%	34	1.75%
	Total Public Lot	489	24.05%	511	27.44%	254	13.08%
GARAGE	Private	1544	75.95%	1351	72.56%	1688	86.92%
	TOTAL LOT % of ALL SPACES	2033	73.50%	1862	61.57%	1942	53.90%
	GARAGE SPACES						
	Existing Public						
	Hourly	210	70.00%	150	20.13%	156	12.72%
	Rental ^{e/}	90	30.00%	150	20.13%	589	48.04%
	Total Existing	300	100.00%	300	40.27%	745	60.77%
	Proposed Public						
	Hourly	0	0.00%	64	8.59%	149	12.15%
	Rental	0	0.00%	381	51.14%	332	27.08%
	Total Proposed	0	0.00%	445	59.73%	481	39.23%
	TOTAL GARAGE % of ALL SPACES	300	10.85%	745	24.64%	1226	34.03%
TOTAL		2766	100.00%	3024	100.00%	3603	100.00%

a/ Survey by Winchester Planner during October, 1973.

b/ Survey by Harland Bartholomew & Associates, July, 1981.

c/ Survey by Winchester Planning Department during June, 1990.

d/ Reserved for special purposes as police business, government officials, fire department use, etc.

e/ Braddock Auto Park number of spaces for hourly (transient) vs. rental changed from 210:90 in 1973, to 150:150 in 1981, and then to 92:208 in 1990.

shelters in the downtown- one at the central transfer point and one in front of the Braddock Street Market on the west side of North Braddock Street. All of the taxi services licensed to operate in Winchester provide service throughout the downtown area. The merits of operating limited public transit (such as special needs) service on the mall should be investigated. Allowing any traffic other than the buses and the time-restricted vehicle travel already permitted on the mall is not recommended at this time.

LAND USE ORGANIZATION

The pattern of existing land use is illustrated on Plate 3. The retail core is located on both sides of the Loudoun Street Mall extending from Piccadilly Street on the north to Cork Street on the south. The Loudoun Street retail blocks are surrounded by several blocks of additional retail, general commercial and service uses, offices, banks and the like. The City-County government complex extends two blocks from Loudoun Street to Kent Street between Rouss Avenue and Boscawen Street. What little industrial use there is in Winchester's downtown area is located along the railroad one, two or three blocks east of Loudoun Street. The Woolen Mill property at the corner of Piccadilly Street and East Lane is currently zoned CM-1 and was last utilized for warehousing. Continued use of this site for truck oriented industrial use is not recommended. One suggestion would be to rezone the site to B-1 on a conditional basis to serve as a catalyst for redevelopment and adaptive reuse.

It is particularly significant that the central business district is located in the center of the City's historic district and is surrounded by extensive residential areas. Unlike many central business districts it is not surrounded by a wasteland of unattractive buildings, clutter and deterioration. Attractive and historic residences are located to the north and west. Historic residences are also situated to the east and to the northeast. To the south lies a 12 to 15 block "mixed use area" of old buildings, predominantly single-family residential, but containing numerous two-family, multiple-family and business uses.

No changes in the general land use organization of the Winchester downtown area are anticipated in the foreseeable future. It is important, however, to maintain the historic character of the district, to maintain the advantages of architectural qualities so valuable yet so often lost in American cities. In the mixed use area south of the business district, the RB-1 zoning should help to maintain the generally small scale of buildings while discouraging the destruction of valuable and historic buildings which might be necessitated by an effort to provide parking for any major generator of traffic and parking demand. Recent changes around the former hospital district should assure that reuse of the remaining structure is compatible with the surrounding residential neighborhood. Establishment of the Health Services (HS) District and reversion of the surrounding parking lots to medium density residential zoning was pursued to implement this transition.

IMPACT OF OUTLYING COMMERCIAL/OFFICE AREAS

Winchester's downtown has done well to maintain its position in the face of increasing competition from outlying shopping and office centers. To date, at least five large shopping centers have been built within or just outside the City. The largest, Apple Blossom Mall, is a major regional shopping mall. Three major department stores; Sears, Penneys, and Leggetts relocated from downtown to the Apple Blossom Mall in 1982. As a consequence, the center of retail trade for the Winchester region has shifted from the downtown area to the mall.

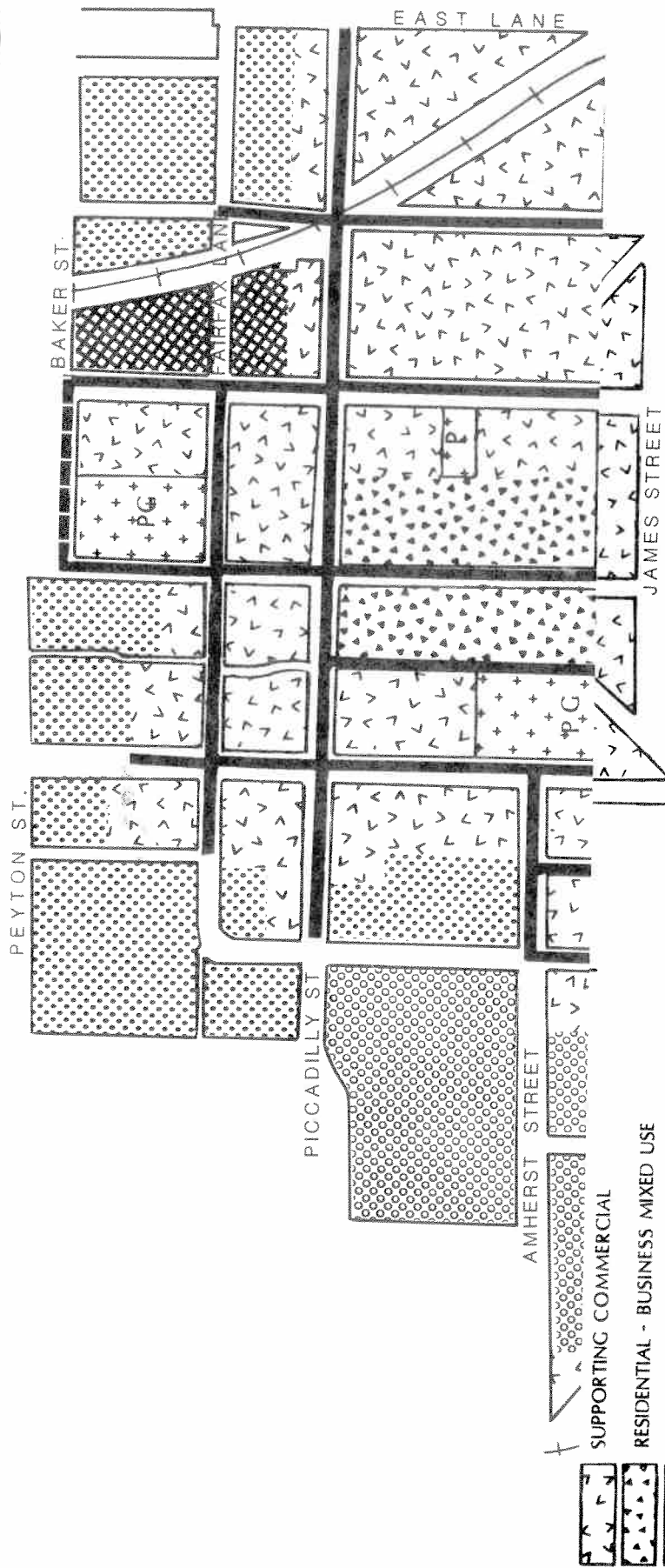
In spite of this, downtown Winchester has the historic ambiance which can never be duplicated in the shopping center. Cooperation between the City, property owners, and merchants has produced an attractive pedestrian mall and adequate well-distributed and attractive parking facilities in downtown. While the center of retail trade may shift, the downtown area can remain strong in retail trade and in addition serve other important functions as a center for general business offices, finance, legal and governmental services. The downtown retail function may change somewhat, with more small businesses and specialty shops replacing the larger stores which have moved, and with stores catering more to downtown office workers. There is a considerable amount of vacant second and third floor space downtown which can be attractively converted to residential use, thus providing more customers for downtown shops.

Office development outside the downtown has not occurred to any significant degree. The one exception may be the medical office concentration along Amherst Street and in the Medical Center District. These uses, however, generate considerably higher amounts of traffic per square foot and are better suited for more suburban settings. The business parks around the airport are likely to draw some corporate offices that might otherwise locate downtown. Retention of government offices in the downtown will assure stable service retail base particularly those establishments catering to the lunch hour traffic.

GENERAL PLAN

The downtown plan focuses primarily on the management of present resources and the identification of potential areas for redevelopment. The sketch plan of Plate 4 reflects generally the existing organization of land uses described before and calls attention to those areas where special management treatment is required. The retail and services core surrounding the Loudoun Street Mall remains much the same as today. The health services district lies to the west and the expanded governmental and judicial center lies to the east. Principal existing parking facilities are noted. These will be supplemented by the construction of the new parking garage adjacent to the financial hub at the north end of the downtown. The entire central business office and governmental complex is surrounded by residential areas of prime importance to the continued health of downtown.

In order to continue the program of building improvement and promotional activities which have proven so important to downtown and to attract new businesses to counter the effect of new shopping centers, a strong commitment to a central management function is needed for downtown. Greater coordination between the various City departments and the Downtown Development Board, the Board of Architectural Review, and the Winchester



PLAN FOR THE DOWNTOWN AREA

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Parking Authority as well as non-City organizations such as the Old Town Winchester Business Association, The Chamber of Commerce, and Preservation of Historic Winchester will ensure timely, cooperative improvements to the physical, economic, and social environment which is Old Town.

An important part of the management approach is the adjustment of City ordinances to facilitate downtown improvements. The zoning ordinance is of course one of these ordinances. The present zoning ordinance provides total parking and loading exemptions for all buildings (and the uses therein) in the B-1 District which front on streets fully encompassing 15 blocks and partially encompassing another 22 blocks. Additionally, buildings containing nonresidential uses within 300 feet of a municipal parking lot are also exempted from requirements for off-street parking and loading space. Since a new parking garage will serve the northern areas, the area of parking exemption should be analyzed and possibly expanded as shown on the downtown plan. This will provide incentive to establish new buildings and also help save old buildings.

As a further means of accommodating residential use downtown, the minimum lot area requirement has been established at 1,000 sq. ft. per dwelling unit (i.e. 43 units per acre) in the B-1 Central Business District. However, to prevent residential overcrowding an "average minimum apartment size" of 300 square feet (excluding bathrooms, closets and storage areas) per dwelling is a part of the zoning regulations for the B-1 District. Changes have also been made to the array of permitted versus conditional uses. Auto and truck sales and service establishments as well as other uses requiring large expanses of surface area have been switched to the conditional use category.

For the area south of the central business district, the new Residential-Business (RB-1) zoning district has been established to accommodate the combined problems of mixed use and preservation of valuable structures. This new district encompasses an area of about 15 blocks formerly zoned B-1. The RB-1 District is patterned mainly on the B-1 Central Business District, but the purpose of the district is to maintain the residential character of the area which presently exists. For this reason, the range of permitted uses is somewhat narrower, thus lowering the danger of large-scale commercial use and the resulting destruction of residential buildings and conflict between residential and business use. The conditional use provision has been employed to enable the City to evaluate potentially less compatible uses and for permitted uses requiring parking or building square footage above the amounts allowed by right.

In the RB-1 District the minimum area requirement is 1,500 square feet per dwelling unit (i.e. 29 units per acre) for residential uses. All dwelling types except rooming and boarding houses are permitted, although some require conditional use approval. A key provision of the RB-1 District is that all structures are limited in height to 35 feet. Together with square footage limitations on nonresidential development, the height limit assures that the scale of future development will be compatible with that which currently exists.

The current height limitation of 75 feet in the B-1 District presents a special challenge in that few existing buildings in Old Town approach this

height and it is questionable as to how well they would mix with such structures. The Winchester House project however has demonstrated that taller structures can be incorporated into the downtown while still preserving the lower heights along the street edges. It is entirely possible that the B-1 zoned area situated south of the RB-1 District may become home to the taller structures because it is outside of the area governed by the Board of Architectural Review.

The southerly B-1 District, while outside of the Historic District, is also outside of the parking exempt area. While the area is currently dominated by development more characteristic of the B-2 Districts, it could change dramatically if market conditions warrant. As suggested in the future land use chapter, some parts of this B-1 district may be more appropriately designated for RB-1 or HR zoning. Lacking the management and marketing support available to the Old Town portion of the B-1 District, care should be taken to ensure that this southerly B-1 zoned area does not become a blighting or overburdening influence on the adjacent residential areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DOWNTOWN

Some of the recommendations for the downtown area are addressed under the Future Land Use chapter, but deserve specific attention under this chapter as well. Many of the recommendations for the downtown fall outside of the realm of responsibility of the Planning Commission and are presented here as suggestions for further study or implementation by entities specifically focused on the downtown.

1. *The Streetscape Design document should be updated to reflect changes made to date as well as new opportunities for streetscape improvement. The plan should be expanded to include guidelines for the secondary district and outlying areas of the B-1 District. The issue of overhead versus underground utilities should be included among the guidelines. Indian Alley is gradually becoming more oriented to pedestrian traffic and provisions for safety and landscaping should be addressed. Designs for the Government Plaza (between the Judicial Center and City Hall), the Old County Courthouse Lawn, the area of the mall east of Wolfe Street, and other specific locations should be reevaluated from a design and functional standpoint. Opportunities for providing better identification of the mall from Piccadilly and Cork Street should also be addressed.*
2. *Transportation improvements (including parking) should be investigated to provide maximum accessibility coupled with minimum time delays. Alternatives which provide convenient parking and loading with attractive pedestrian access to establishments along Piccadilly Street should be pursued. Impacts of introducing two-way traffic on Piccadilly and Fairfax Lane should be fully evaluated as part of an overall circulation study of the downtown. Greater use of transit should also be encouraged.*

3. *Efforts to promote administrative office employment in the downtown should be undertaken. This includes corporate, governmental, legal and FIRE (Financial, Insurance and Real Estate) offices. Upper-story office development should be promoted. Retail and services which cater to this employment sector should be encouraged. The need for lodging and conference facilities in the downtown should also be evaluated.*
4. *Redevelopment of the northeast corner of the downtown should be investigated. Properties such as the Old Woolen Mill and buildings along North Kent Street between Philpot Street and Piccadilly Street deserve study for adaptive reuse. Restoration of the railroad station may provide a focus for tourism-related redevelopment of the area. Removal or relocation of the electrical substation straddling both sides of North Kent Street would make the area more attractive to redevelopment. A study of this area could include the Public Safety Complex and the George Washington Hotel in addition to those fronting along Kent Street.*
5. *The future needs of the fire, police and communications functions currently based in the Public Safety Complex should be conducted. Medium-range needs may very likely exceed the capacity of the existing site. Access to and from a two-way street should also be evaluated.*
6. *Cultural amenities such as museums, galleries and plazas should be encouraged. Exhibitions should be promoted at the Kurtz Cultural Center nearing completion. Other attractions such as the farmers market and outdoor eating areas should be encouraged. Consideration should be given to extending the economic day in downtown by providing more opportunities for evening entertainment such as evening dining, shopping, theater, etc. beyond the periodic events offered by the Downtown Development Board and the Bluemont Concerts. Opportunities for youth entertainment such as that offered at the teen center should be included where appropriate.*
7. *Emphasis on preserving the historic and architectural significance of the Old Town area should be continued. Ongoing review of expanding the Historic Winchester overlay district should result in recommendations as to where the boundaries should be adjusted. Designation of the City as a Certified Local Government should be pursued to further preservation through state and federal grants. Local guidelines for preservation and infill development should be developed.*
8. *Coordination of the Capital Improvement Program process between the City departments and the Downtown Development Board should be strengthened. Infrastructure repair should be handled on a comprehensive basis particularly along the mall. Stormwater management and flood prevention measures must be pursued to assure the vitality of the downtown.*

9. *Opportunities for outdoor recreation and leisure should be expanded to serve the needs of current and future residents in the downtown. Current zoning standards do not include sufficient open space requirements for the density of housing permitted in the downtown. Areas such as the parking lot behind the Judicial Center, the open space proposed in front of the Health Services building along Stewart Street, and the recently acquired Shawnee Springs nature area should be made accessible to the residents of the downtown. Use of the unenclosed portion of the Town Run channel for a pedestrian and/or bicycle link between downtown and Jim Barnett Park should be considered.*

